The Contemporary Fitan

(Afflictions, Trials, Test, Tribulations)

Prepared by

Saleh As-Saleh

Transcribed by
Br. Abu Abdullaah al-Amreeki, *Jazaahullaahu Khairan*,
from live duroos in Paltalk's "Understanding Islam 1" room.
Text edited by sis Umm Ahmad al-Kanadiyyah, *Jazaahaallaahu Khairan*.



The Contemporary Fitan

All Praise is due to Allaah, and may the *salaah* and *salaam* be on Prophet Muhammad, his household, the noble companions and those who follow them until the Day of Resurrection.

I testify that there is no true god worthy of worship except Allaah, and that Muhammad is Allaah's true slave and messenger. The topic is *fitan* (afflictions) in our time and the position of the Muslim towards them.

The Meaning of Fitnah

The linguistic meaning of *fitnah* is testing, afflictions, and trials. It is derived from *fitnatul fiddati wa-thahab* (the testing of gold and silver when they are melted under heat to distinguish the pure parts from the impurities). Also, *fitnah* linguistically means burning as in the saying of Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) (in the translation of the meaning):

«(It will be) a Day when they will be tried (i.e. burnt) [yuftanoon] over the Fire!» Surah ath-Thaariyat (51:13**)**

As to the legal or Islamic meaning of *fitnah*, *fitnah* in essence has the same meaning as the linguistic definition. That is why the word *fitnah* came in the Qur'an to mean trial, testing, and distinguishing. Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) said (in the translation of the meaning):

«Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: "We believe," and will not be tested (yuftanoon)?» Surah al-Ankabut (29:2)

Also, the saying of Allaah (in the translation of the meaning):

«Everyone is going to taste death, and We shall make a trial (fitnah) of you with evil and with good, and to Us you will be returned.» Surah al-Anbiya' (21:35)

In addition, the term *fitnah* came to mean burning and punishment in the fire, as Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) said (in the translation of the meaning):

«"Taste you your trial (burning) [fitnatakum]! This is what you used to ask to be hastened!"» Surah ath-Thaariyat (51:14)

The word *fitnah* also came in the Qur'an to have other meanings, including *shirk* (association in worship).

The Preordainment of *Fitan*

The *fitan* are universal decrees. Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) made it clear in His book that the testing of His slaves is a universal way, not changed nor altered. This is obvious when Allaah said (in the translation of the meaning):

«Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: "We believe," and will not be tested? And, We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allaah will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars, (although Allaah knows all that before putting them to test).» Surah al-Ankabut (29:2-3)

Similarly, Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) stated (in the translation of the meaning):

«Or think you that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, "When (will come) the Help of Allaah?" Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allaah is near!» Surah al-Baqarah (2:214)

Therefore, it becomes clear that the *fitnah*, trials, and afflictions are a matter preordained by Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), befalling those of the past and the later times. It is inevitable that each one of the children of Adam will be tested; he may pass, or he may fail. This is all due to the great and perfect wisdom of Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*).

Wisdom of Ordaining the *Fitan*

Allaah does not ordain a matter nor do anything except according to a *hikmah* (wisdom). This wisdom may be known, or it may not be known, as Allaah mentioned (in the translation of the meaning):

«He cannot be questioned as to what He does, while they will be questioned.» Surah al-Anbiya' (21:23)

We do know some of the wisdoms of Allaah in the ordainment of *fitan*. From these wisdoms is distinguishing the believers from the non-believers as Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) said (in the translation of the meaning):

«And, We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allaah will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars, (although Allaah knows all that before putting them to test).» Surah al-Ankabut (29:3)

The second wisdom is purifying the believers from their sins, as the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said,

> "No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that." [See *Bukhari, Volume 7, Book*

70, Number 545.]

Thus, whatever befalls the Muslim from the afflictions, catastrophes, and trials, then this is an expiation of his sins. This expiation covers both the minor and major sins, according to the intensity of the trial. We know the highest intensity of trials befalls the prophets and those who are next in piety and those who are next after them and so forth.

The third wisdom is the lifting of the ranks of the believers to higher levels because of the reward they will receive due to the trials and afflictions, if he is patient. There are texts that indicate this, as in the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) where he said,

> "No calamity befalls a Muslim but that Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it were the prick he receives from a thorn." [See *Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 70, Number 544*]

Also, in another hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), stated,

> "A believer does not receive (the trouble) of running a thorn or more than that but Allah elevates him in rank or effaces his sins because of that." [See Muslim, *Book 32, Number 6238*].

Hence, the believer is raised to a higher level due to his patience and perseverance.

The fourth wisdom behind ordaining the *fitan* is compensating the believer when the believer is put through a trial whereby he loses something beloved or loses some wealth. If he perseveres and is patient, then Allaah will compensate him with something better than what he lost as proven in the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) that,

> "Allaah said, 'If I deprive my slave of his two beloved things (his eyes) and he remains patient, I will let him enter Paradise in compensation for them.'" [*Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 70, Number 557.*]

These are some of the wisdoms behind the ordainment of *fitan* (afflictions), and these are just a few out of many. What is kept with Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), in His Knowledge, is much greater, and there is no doubt concerning that. What is mentioned suffices as an indication.

Types of *Fitan*

There are many types of *fitan*, but they all converge to two main types. The first type is *Fitnatu-Shubuhaat* (the *fitnah* of unclear matters, doubts, and misconceptions). These afflictions of *shubuhaat* (doubt) oppose the correct *'aqeedah* (creed), leading to a corruption in thinking and in conceptions. Therefore, the person afflicted will deviate from the path of the *salaf* (the pious predecessors) totally or partially and may also deviate in understanding the divine wisdom concerning certain matters. In addition, that person may innovate in the religion that which is not part of it. *Fitnatu-*

Shubuhaat is the greatest type of *fitnah* as it may lead to *kufr* (disbelief) and *shirk* (association in worship).

The second type of *fitnah* is *fitnatu-Shahawaat* (the *fitnah* of lusts and desires). This type of *fitnah* opposes the will and leads to corruption in conduct. Despite the great danger associated with this type of *fitnah*, it is less dangerous than *fitnatu-Shubuhaaat*. From the actions of the type of fitnah is following the lusts of one's belly, private parts, and the like.

The Causes of *Fitan*

There are many causes which lead to *fitan* and from these is first, *ittiba'ul-hawa wa fasad al-qasd* (following of desires and corruption of intent). Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) said (in the translation of the meaning):

«O Dawud (David)! Verily! We have placed you as a successor on earth, so judge you between men in truth (and justice) and follow not your desire for it will mislead you from the Path of Allaah. Verily! Those who wander astray from the Path of Allaah (shall) have a severe torment, because they forgot the Day of Reckoning.» Surah Sad (38:26)

The second cause of *fitnah* is *al-jahlu wanabdul 'ilm* (ignorance and the abandonment of knowledge). The person with beneficial knowledge knows the nature of *fitnah* and its doors, and this makes him safe. In contrast, it is easy for the ignorant to fall into the *fitan* as he is ignorant concerning it, its causes, and the means of dealing with it.

The third cause of *fitan* is the following the *motashaabih* (the texts that are not entirely clear) and leaving those texts which are entirely clear on their own. This is what Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) warned about when He said (in the translation of the meaning):

«So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking Al-Fitnah (polytheism and trials, etc.), and seeking for its hidden meanings» Surah aali-Imran (3:7)

Thus, following the unclear texts leads to *fitnah* in reality, as what took place with the people of desires, from the past and present.

The fourth cause of *fitnah* is *al-ifratu wat-tafreet* (exaggeration and negligence). Islam is a medium course between negligence and exaggeration. As for exaggeration, it leads to *fitan* as the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) explained, "Beware of exaggeration for it led to the destruction of the people before you, by leading them to shed blood and to make lawful what was unlawful for them."

These are just a few causes of *fitnah*. There are more in addition to these four.

Some Forms of Contemporary *Fitan*

In our times, *fitan* have increased and multiplied, turning many away from their *deen* (religion). Some of these *fitan* are as follows:

First *fitnatul maal* (the *fitnah* of wealth). Many people seek to gain wealth in any possible way, caring not if that wealth is lawful or unlawful. What matters to them, instead, is attaining wealth, thinking it is the means to meet their needs. That is why people are in strong competition to earn money and to have more and more of it. This is a very dangerous *fitnah* and is spreading.

The second type of *fitnah* is *al-fitnatu-nisaa'* (the *fitnah* of women), and this is the greatest *fitnah* to mankind as the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said,

"I have not left behind me a *fitnah* more harmful to men than women." [See *Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 62, Number 33*.]

Shaytaan took hold of many people through this *fitnah* by inspiring and whispering to many women to dress in attractive clothes, to put on all the attractive forms of perfume, and the like from the means of *fitan*. Other dangers include mixing environments, all of which have led to very severe consequences. Many people, both men and women, became negligent concerning lowering the gaze and from trying to protect themselves from this *fitnah*; many men are leaving homes for affairs, and many women are also getting "bored."!

The third type of *fitnah* is fear of people due to the weakness of faith and lack of certainty and dependence on Allaah; this is the reason why many people began to fear other than Allaah and withhold from saying the truth, fearing for their lives and their provisions, as Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) stated (in the translation of the meanings):

«Of mankind are some who say: "We believe in Allaah," but if they are made to suffer for the sake of Allaah, they consider the trial of mankind as Allaah's punishment, and if victory comes from your Lord, (the hypocrites) will say: "Verily! We were with you (helping you)." Is not Allaah Best Aware of what is in the breast of the 'Alamîn (mankind and jinns).» Surah al-Ankabut (29:10)

The fourth type of *fitnah* is the following of *motashaabih* (that which is not entirely clear on its own). This has led to the emergence of the deviant sects from the people of *ahwaa'* (desires) like those who deny the attributes of Allaah, or parts of the attributes, as well as those who make it permissible to shed the blood of Muslims, based on false *ta'weel* (interpretation). This also includes those who deny the predecree of Allaah, which encompasses everything, and those who want to make *takfeer* (impute disbelief) on the Muslims due to their sins and disobedience. Similarly, this type of *fitnah* includes those who call for rebellion against the Muslim rulers by force, or those who give allegiance to the leaders of groups, while making *takfeer* on those who oppose them. These are just a few groups of the past and present who have deviated.

The fifth type is *fitnat-taqleed al-kufaar* (the affliction of following the ways of the *kufaar*). In many parts of the Muslim world, people are following and imitating the way of the *kufaar* (disbelievers) in their dress, movements, etiquettes, and in having them as examples. This has led to a problem with the Islamic identity.

The sixth type constitutes one of most serious manifestations of *fitanu-Shubuhaat* in our times. It is the *fitnah* of the *Raafidhah* (rejectionist shia) who impute *kufr* on all the companions (*sahaabah*, may Allaah be please with all them) and who magnify graves and invoke other than Allaah, and believe that their Imaams know the unseen and that they are better than the Prophets as well as the Angels as documented in their classical references. Many Muslims are carried away by politics and don't see in the *Raafidhah* anything wrong because they are deceived by their revolutionary political positions. People mostly go by emotions on this and tend not to examine their creeds. That is why they end up supporting the *Raafidhah* politically. This is the first step towards adopting their shia doctrine, and this is actually taking place nowadays in many countries in the Muslim World. Our sh. Muhammad bin Saalih al-'Uthaimeen (*rahimahullaah*) asserted before his death that the "***fitnah*** **of the Raafidhah is the greatest in our times**."

Linked to this *fitnah* is that most of the political Islamic groups in our times are aligned with them for the sake of politics. This position has done a great harm to *ahlus-Sunnah* in many parts of the Muslim World. For the sake of political and financial gains, they try to minimize the influence and danger of the *Raafidhah* on the Muslim Public. Allaahul Musta'aan.

Position of the Muslim Towards *Fitan*

Islam has set forth means of protection from *fitan* and made clear the position that the Muslim should take vis-à-vis *fitan*. From that is **first**, seeking refuge with Allaah from *fitan*, since Allaah is the One all capable of protecting and preventing the believer from falling into *fitan*. This can be done during *salaah* (prayers) and in times other than that. The Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) advised us to make the following invocation in *salaah* before the *tasleem* saying,

> "When one of you finishes the last *tashahood*, then let him seek refuge with Allaah from four things, '*Min athaab jahannam wa min athaab al-qabr wa min fitnah al-mahyaa wal-mamaat wa min sharri fitnatil Maseeh ad-Dajjal*' (From the punishment of Hell, and from the punishment of the grave, and from the afflictions of life and death, and from the evil affliction of the False Christ.)" [See Muslim, *Volume 2, Book 23, Number 459*.]

The second means of protection is holding onto the book of Allaah and the authentic *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), according to the understanding of the companions and those who followed them from the righteous predecessors. Allaah said (in the translation of the meaning):

«(Allaah) said: "Get you down (from the Paradise to the earth), both of you, together, some of you are an enemy to some others. Then if there comes to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My Guidance shall neither go astray, nor fall into distress and misery.» Surah Ta-Ha (20:123)

The third means of protection from *fitnah* is *talibul 'ilm ash-shari' an-naafi'* (seeking the beneficial Islamic knowledge). The sources for this knowledge should be the

authentic books of the righteous predecessors (salaf) and the reliable scholars of *ahlus-Sun*nah, who follow the path of the *salaf*. This is where the Muslim should look to acquire the beneficial legal knowledge.

Knowledge is from the greatest legal means of protection, as it protects against ignorance. Therefore, the knowledgeable person is the one who protects himself, his family, and in turn the society at large from affliction.

The fourth means of protecting against *fitnah* is cautioning others not to rebel against the general Muslim body and their leaders. This is because the Messenger (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) directed the great companion, Hudaifa ibn al-Yaman, to hold tight to the general body of Muslims and their leader when he asked concerning what to do if the time of *fitan* reaches him. When Hudaifa asked what he should do if there is no general Muslim body, or Imaam (Leader), the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) replied,

> Then keep away from all those sects, even if you have to bite upon the roots of a tree, until death reaches you whilst you are in that state." [See Bukhari, *Volume 9, Book 88, Number 206*.]

This is something very important to remember, and it is to caution others against rebelling against the leaders, even if they are tyrants and oppressors, as long as there is no clear cut *kufr*, as the Prophet (ﷺ: *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said,

> "Unless you see clear *kufr* based on authority from Allaah."

Our Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-'Uthaimeen (*rahimahullaah*) used to say that the clarity of the *kufr* of the leaders should be clearer than the sun on the clearest, brightest day; there should be no tiny clouds (meaning no possible doubt of his *kufr*) because this is something that leads to *fitnah* and bloodshed, as has been witnessed in many Muslim countries.

The fifth means of protecting against *fitnah* is preserving the *taqwa* of Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) and holding to that. *Taqwa* means to act in obedience to Allaah on true guidance, seeking His reward, and to refrain from disobedience to Allaah on true guidance, fearing His punishment. *Taqwa* is the best protection against *fitnah*; it is the barrier between the person and following his desires. May Allaah (*subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), the Most High, guide us to all that is beloved to Him and pleasing to Him.

All Praise is due to Allaah, and may the *salaah* and *salaam* be on Prophet Muhammad, his household, the noble companions and those who follow them until the Day of Resurrection.

Saleh As-Saleh, 2nd Sh'abaan 1427 A.H.
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References: based upon an article by sh. Muhammad Al-Khumayess (*hafidhahullaah*) in his book *Natharaat wa Ta'mmulaat min Waaq'I al-Hayaat*, 1419/1998.